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LETTER DATED 26 MAY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward a statement issued on 26 May 1999 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea, Haile Weldensae, concerning Ethiopia's accusations regarding Eritrean involvement in Somalia (see annex), which are only intended to serve as a smokescreen for Ethiopia's long-standing and escalating armed intervention in Somalia to forward its own expansionist and hegemonist goals.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Statement issued by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 26 May 1999

Ethiopia's wanton acts of destabilization in Somalia

In a letter dated 14 May 1999 addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1999/563, annex), the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of embarking on a "large-scale military activity of destabilization in Somalia". He further states that Eritrea is guilty of violating Security Council resolution 733 (1992) through its shipment of arms to one of the warring factions.

The audacity of the Ethiopian regime in levelling these hypocritical accusations against Eritrea is not surprising. Indeed, it has now become common practice for the leadership in Addis Ababa to flagrantly violate fundamental principles of international law - whether it is in acts of brazen aggression, human rights violations or blatant incursions against neighbouring countries - and then accuse its victims for the very transgressions that it is guilty of in a pre-emptive, if transparent, manner.

What are the true facts as far as Somalia is concerned?

Somalia has long been a victim of repeated Ethiopian incursions, as well as manipulative acts of training and arming different warring factions at different times. Indeed, in violating the territorial sovereignty of Somalia under the pretext of containing "the threat from terrorist groups", the Addis Ababa regime continues to carry out periodic military aggression against Somalia. The real purpose is, however, to project power so as to dictate events in Somalia.

Since January this year alone, Ethiopia has launched several major incursions into Somalia. The Addis Ababa regime conducted military operations in the areas of Luuq, Gedo and Dolo in January and carried out repeated incursions in the same areas in May, as emphasized in the letters of the Benadir Administration to the Security Council. In all those cases, the aim was to bolster factions that Ethiopia supports.

The Ethiopian regime established a military training camp in Bulahow, inside Somalia, early last year to train "favoured" factions. This represented the institutionalization of a training programme that had been going on for the previous two years in different parts of Somalia. Again, these acts were aimed at exacerbating factional in-fighting in Somalia.

Ethiopia has long since violated Security Council resolution 733 (1992) calling for an arms embargo against the Somali factions. In 1997, Ethiopia supplied several shipments of arms and training to the Somali National Front (SNF) as a "counterweight" to other groups. In 1998, Ethiopia again supplied several shipments of arms, both through the port of Bosaso and by land, to Somali factions under its tutelage, provoking repeated protests from "Somali-land", the Benadir Administration and other major factions. On 3 April 1999,

the Associated Press reported that "several lorries of assorted weapons were delivered by Ethiopia to Hussein Haji Bod". On 5 May, the British Broadcasting Corporation and Reuters reported that "Ethiopia has supplied arms and ammunition in military plans to the port city of Kismayo to forces opposed to Aideed", and that "Ethiopia had previously trucked arms to other anti-Aideed forces at the town of Belet Uen". In a similar vein, the leader of Somali-land, Mr. Egal, lamented to the Standing Committee in Somalia that visited Hargeisa in December last year that "whether the Committee refuses to accept or not, aircraft loaded with arms and ammunition are landing regularly in Kalkayo in Kismayo and in several airports of central Shebelle area". This was a clear reference to Ethiopia's duplicity, as the areas in question are areas controlled by factions supported by Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia has been doggedly pursuing this pattern of intermittent incursion into Somalia and continuous supply of arms to different factions at different times in order to achieve the following overriding policy aim: the Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) regime does not want any central authority to emerge in Somalia. Its pronounced policy is the creation of clan-based mini-States so as to manipulate a weak and divided Somalia.

This obsession has compromised its neutrality and the mandate that Ethiopia was entrusted with by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to promote national reconciliation and peace in Somalia. The Sodere Conference, which excluded some of the key players in Somalia, was a disappointment to IGAD. Ethiopia's failure to redress this mistake in the subsequent period, giving rise to a proliferation of initiatives that were not coordinated, finally impelled some IGAD member States to recommend, at the Summit held in Djibouti in March 1998, that the initiative be carried out under the auspices of the Chairman and the secretariat of IGAD.

Ethiopia's pretext that its actions in Somalia are dictated by its security needs of containing "terrorist incursions" and its accusation that "Eritrea is working hand-in-glove" with terrorist groups is preposterous and a pure fabrication. Indeed, Eritrea has been, and continues to be, at the forefront in the regional efforts to combat terrorism emanating from fundamentalist and extremist groups. Eritrea has not, in fact, compromised its principled position to dally with and accommodate terrorist groups or their sponsors for tactical and short-term gains, as has sadly been the case with Ethiopia.

At any rate, Eritrea believes that regional terrorism can only be contained and combated through concerted action by the countries of the region. In this spirit, it has not spared any effort to promote regional cooperation towards that end.

In conclusion, Eritrea's track record establishes without doubt that it has no vested interest in destabilizing Somalia. On the contrary, Eritrea has been consistently working to promote national reconciliation of the Somalis, without partiality or preference towards selected factions on the basis of narrow self-interest.

Similarly, Eritrea has no desire or sinister design to use Somalia as a battleground for a "proxy war" with Ethiopia. Eritrea firmly believes that the

Somali problem is one of the fundamental security problems in the region. Its solution depends primarily on the Somali people themselves, although it will undoubtedly be enhanced and accelerated by the concerted and constructive efforts of all the countries of the region. Thus, even if Ethiopia has a long border with Somalia, this cannot be used as a pretext to give it a free hand to aggravate the conflict in Somalia, which will have obvious consequences for the stability of the Horn of Africa region.

In the circumstances, the right course of action for Ethiopia is to refrain from its continuous acts of destabilization of Somalia in pursuit of its narrow interests, which are contrary to the interests and aspirations of the region and in contravention of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile WELDENSAE
Minister for Foreign Affairs